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SUBJECT: INDIA AND NATO: TIME FOR DIALOGUE

REF: 09 NEW DELHI 637

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Participants in the Fourth India-NATO Dialogue, a non-governmental "track II" event held in New Delhi February 1, agreed that the time was right to establish a regular, sustained, official dialogue between the world's largest democracy and its mightiest military alliance. The NATO officials noted a marked change from previous years, with Indian participants focused more on what kind of engagement to pursue rather than debating the value of any relationship with NATO. Participants expressed interest in discussing regional issues such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, but they were more animated by the prospect of a broader dialogue addressing longer-term strategic factors associated with China's rise and NATO's engagement in Central and South Asia. India's senior strategists acknowledged New Delhi's instinctive disinclination toward alliances, which they tended to associate with the Warsaw Pact, and confessed a surprising level of ignorance of NATO's founding principles, internal procedures, and diverse associations with non-members -- but also a keen appreciation of the value of this relationship for India's strategic future. END SUMMARY.

India-NATO Dialogue: Godzilla and King Kong

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12. (SBU) Participants in the Fourth India-NATO Dialogue held in New Delhi January 1 agreed that the time was right for regular, official dialogue between the world's largest democracy and its mightiest military alliance. The fourth installment of this non-governmental "track II" dialogue sponsored by the United Service Institution of India, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, brought together retired senior Indian officials and strategic affairs commentators with current and former NATO officials to discuss the regional strategic environment and global challenges. Chairman of the Political Committee in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Karl Lamers outlined NATO's work on a new strategic concept, its first

update since 1999, which would address many new threats shared by India, such as counterterrorism, nuclear security, cyber security, energy security, and water issues. Head of the Planning Section of the Operations Division Diego Ruiz Palmer discussed NATO's operations in Afghanistan, but also stressed that NATO maintained over 40 partnerships outside of Europe with countries as diverse as Japan and Colombia. Deputy Head of the Secretary General's Policy Planning Unit Michael Ruhle emphasized the value of dialogue "despite lingering doubts," citing NATO's institutionalized relationship with Russia and its political dialogue with China and noting NATO's "flexible menu" of options for engagement.

13. (SBU) A consensus quickly emerged among the Indian participants that regular, sustained, official dialogue with NATO was in India's interest. Participants remarked that this consensus contrasted starkly with the tone of previous years, which one participant characterized privately as "like King Kong and Godzilla eyeing one another suspiciously across the room." Jawarhalal Nehru University Professor Radha Kumar observed that official dialogue with NATO would have been inconceivable due to the presence of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) in the governing coalition, which was no longer the case.

Issue-based Dialogue: Afghanistan, But Also China

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14. (SBU) Participants focused more on what kind of engagement was most appropriate rather than whether engagement would be useful. Some participants suggested that India's relationship with NATO should develop through a discussion of issues rather than on the basis of a "formal affiliation," but they accepted the need to institutionalize the dialogue in some form. While participants acknowledged that dialogue would be particularly useful in light of NATO's role in Afghanistan, they agreed that the scope of the engagement should not be limited to a single issue. The Indian participants were also aware of NATO's growing relationship with Pakistan, but did not appear concerned by this development, nor did they view developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan as the most compelling reason for developing their own relationship with NATO. Rather, they seemed more swayed by India's interest in addressing longer-term strategic factors associated with China's rise and NATO's engagement in Central and South Asia.

East-West Masala

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15. (SBU) In a particularly lively session, professor at the German Federal Armed Forces University Carlo Masala challenged the participants to explain how India had justified waiting so long to engage NATO. He explained that the invocation of the Article V mutual defense provision in the NATO Charter following the 9/11 attacks forced the Alliance to focus on global threats, many of which India shared. India was also in the midst of a strategic transformation, witnessing a historic power shift in Asia while at the same time managing its own rise as a power. Under these circumstances, India needed to diversify its relationships, especially with democracies, which shared an interest in managing power shifts peacefully. Masala added that NATO had experiences that might be usefully shared. For instance, he noted that Asia lacked a conventional arms control regime, an area where NATO had deep experience from its relationship with the Warsaw Pact. NATO had been networking with the other key players in the region for some time -- including China, Japan, and Russia, as well as Pakistan -- but Masala wondered aloud how India could continue to remain aloof.

16. (SBU) Masala's remarks were met by a stunned, sympathetic

silence from the crowd of famously loquacious and contrarian pundits. The chair of the session, former Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar, closed the session observing that it was "evident India had much to learn about NATO." He concluded that "some form of dialogue should be institutionalized," and that over time "the substance of our relationship will grow."

Not the Warsaw Pact

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¶7. (SBU) In another noteworthy session, Indian participants grudgingly acknowledged an entrenched antipathy toward alliances, as well as a principled assumption that relations with the NATO members, particularly the United States, rendered direct relations with NATO redundant. Commodore (ret.) C. Uday Bhaskar said India preferred relationships with political rather than military entities. His repeated assertion that the United States determined NATO's agenda met with an impassioned correction from Former Chief of Staff of the German Armed Forces and Former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee General (ret.) Harald Kujat. Kujat explained that the Alliance was originally established as a political association until galvanized by the Korean War.

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Conceding that the United States played a justifiably important role, he stressed that NATO was a community of 28 sovereign democracies that operated according to a well-established set of rules and principles that applied equally to all member states.

¶8. (SBU) Several Indian participants stressed that self-reliance was an important lesson of India's post-independence history, which had contributed to its instinctive disinclination toward alliances. A sympathetic participant cautioned that Indians would continue to view NATO as primarily a military organization, but allowed that the opportunity to better understand its structure would help open eyes to opportunities for cooperation. Former Foreign Secretary M.K. Rasgotra, who closed the conference, confessed privately that Indian officials had secretly hoped that NATO would disband following the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, and found it more convenient to maintain the fiction that it was no longer relevant. He observed that Indians seemed to think of NATO as a direct analogue to the Warsaw Pact, with which they were more familiar during the Cold War, which explained their surprising lack of awareness of its founding principles, procedures, or diverse associations with non-members.

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